

Message Text

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R 221641Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6983
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
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AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LISBON
USNMR SHAPE
USMISSION USNATO
USCINCEUR
DIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
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AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
USMISSION USBERLIN
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 06015

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS 1978: A NO-WIN CONTEST FOR THE PCF?

SUMMARY: THE MARCH ELECTIONS LOOK VERY MUCH LIKE A NO-
WIN CONTEST FOR THE FRENCH COMMUNISTS, UNLESS THEY ARE
READY TO EAT THEIR WORDS OF THE LAST SIX MONTHS AND
ENTER GOVERNMENT ON SOCIALIST TERMS. THERE IS LITTLE
CHANCE THAT THE PCF CAN EITHER REBALANCE THE ELECTORAL

EQUATION OR FORCE PROGRAMMATIC CONCESSIONS OUT OF THE PS. MOREOVER, ANALYSIS OF RECENT POLLS SHOWS THAT SOCIALIST PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTH IS LARGELY INDEPENDENT OF COMMUNIST ACTIONS, SO THAT ELECTORAL NON-COOPERATION BY THE PCF WOULD HURT THE COMMUNISTS MORE THAN THE SOCIALISTS:

- BY KEEPING ITS CANDIDATES IN THE RACE ON THE SECOND ROUND, THE PCF CAN STILL PREVENT A VICTORY BY THE LEFT. BUT EVEN SUCH A SABOTAGE POLICY COULD NOT HOPE TO REDUCE PS DEPUTIES BELOW 130-140 (WHICH REPRESENTS A NET INCREASE FOR THE PS OF 40-50 DEPUTIES IN COMPARISON WITH THE CURRENT ASSEMBLY).
- MOREOVER, IF PCF CANDIDATES REMAIN IN THE RACE ON THE SECOND ROUND, THE COMMUNIST SCORE WILL BE EMBARRASSINGLY LOW BECAUSE OF DEFLECTIONS TO THE PS AND OTHER ELECTORAL REASONS. THE PCF COULD LOSE ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF ITS POTENTIAL SEATS.

THUS, AS MUCH AS THE COMMUNISTS MIGHT LIKE TO WORK A DRASTIC FACELIFT ON THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE (AND ULTIMATELY OF COURSE ELIMINATE THE PS AS A LEFT COMPETITOR), THE PREVAILING FORCES FOR THIS MARCH NOW SEEM TO PUSH THE PCF TOWARD SOME FORM OF ELECTORAL COOPERATION. WHETHER SUCH COOPERATION WOULD BE WHOLEHEARTED (IN WHICH CASE A LEFT MAJORITY WOULD BE VERY LIKELY BASED ON CUR-

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RENT POLLS) OR ONLY FORMAL IS STILL A QUESTION WHICH ONLY THE PCF CAN ANSWER AND ON WHICH THE ELECTION TURNS. IN EITHER CASE, THE COMMUNISTS COULD ONLY CUT THEIR LOSSES. MARCH 12 MAY BE THE DAY OF RECKONING FOR THE PCF STRATEGY OF LEFT UNITY AND, UNLESS THE PARTY CHANGES ITS DEFINITION OF SUCCESS OVERNIGHT, THE RESULTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE POSITIVE FROM ITS POINT OF VIEW.

END SUMMARY.

1. "REPUBLICAN DISCIPLINE", LIKE IT OR NOT?: SINCE FEBRUARY 9, THE COMMUNISTS HAVE WORKED HARD AT YET ANOTHER EFFORT TO ENLARGE THEIR MANEUVERING ROOM FOR THE MARCH ELECTIONS -- THIS TIME BY CALLING INTO QUESTION THE CONCEPT OF "REPUBLICAN DISCIPLINE" (STEPPING DOWN ON THE SECOND ROUND IN FAVOR OF THE BETTER-PLACED LEFT CANDIDATE). ACCORDING TO HUMANITE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE ONCE IRONCLAD TRADITION OF THE FRENCH LEFT HAS NOW BEEN "RELEGATED TO THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY ALONG WITH THE OIL LAMP." PCF LEADERS HAVE CRITICIZED THE CONCEPT FAR AND WIDE AS A TACTICAL MANEUVER TRADITIONALLY USED TO BRING WORKING CLASS SUPPORT TO POLITICAL PARTIES WHICH, ONCE ELECTED, PROMPTLY BETRAYED THE WORKERS' INTERESTS (THE

CASE OF MARIO SOARES AND HIS CENTRIST ALLIANCE IS READY-
MADE FOR THE PCF PROPAGANDA MILL). CONSEQUENTLY, SAY THE
COMMUNISTS, THE PS CANNOT BE GIVEN A BLANK CHECK --
PROGRAMMATIC COMMITMENT MUST PRECEDE ANY AGREEMENT FOR
SECOND-ROUND ELECTORAL SUPPORT.

2. IN THREATENING NON-APPLICATION OF REPUBLICAN DISCI-
PLINE, THE PCF:
-- HOPES TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE PS TO MAKE PRO-

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GRAMMATIC CONCESSIONS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS;
AND

-- LAYS THE THEORETICAL GROUNDWORK FOR LACK OF
COMMUNIST COOPERATION ON THE SECOND ROUND
AND SUBSEQUENT REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
GOVERNMENT, SHOULD SUCH A STRATEGY BE NECES-
SARY.

IN FACT, THE THREAT HAS ALREADY BEEN ANSWERED BY THE
SOCIALISTS WHO ARE ON RECORD IN OPPOSITION TO ANY FUR-
THER NEGOTIATION ON THE COMMON PROGRAM BETWEEN THE TWO
ROUNDS. (IF THE PCF FIRST COMMITS ITSELF TO REPUBLICAN
DISCIPLINE, HOWEVER, THE PS HAS CONCEDED THAT IT WOULD
BE WILLING TO CONCLUDE A GENERAL STATEMENT OF PROGRAM
OBJECTIVES BEFORE THE MARCH 19 SECOND ROUND). THE STA-
LEMATE SEEMS TOTAL: PROGRAM FIRST, REPUBLICAN DISCIPLINE
SECOND FOR THE PCF WITH EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE COMMITMENT
FROM THE PS.

3. THE LIMITS OF SABOTAGE: STALEMATE OR NO, HOWEVER,
THE SOCIALISTS ARE CLEARLY MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE WITH
THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS THAN IS THE PCF. CENTRAL
TO PS THINKING IS THE LITTLE RECOGNIZED FACT THAT WHILE
THE COMMUNISTS CAN EFFECTIVELY PREVENT A LEFT VICTORY
(IN NUMBERS OF DEPUTIES), THEY CANNOT SERIOUSLY HURT THE
SOCIALISTS AS A POLITICAL PARTY. EVEN WITH PCF CANDIDA-
TES REMAINING IN THE SECOND-ROUND RACE COUNTRYWIDE, THE
PS SHOULD STILL WIN SOME 140 SEATS (ACCORDING TO MOST
RECENT POLLS; A MINIMUM OF 143 SAYS PS ELECTIONS SPECIA-
LIST ROGER FAJARDIE; 124 SAYS LOUIS HARRIS/EXPRESS);
AND EMERGE AS NOT ONLY THE FIRST PARTY OF FRANCE IN
POPULAR VOTES, BUT ALSO POSSIBLY THE LARGEST PARTY IN
THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. FOR THE COMMUNISTS, ON THE OTHER
HAND, THE COST OF SUCH GENERAL SABOTAGE WOULD BE PROPOR-
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TIONALLY MORE SEVERE, REDUCING CURRENT DEPUTIES TO
ABOUT 50.

4. THE ROOTS OF PS IMMUNITY: THE SOCIALIST FAIT ACCOM-

PLI WHICH NOW SEEMS TO CONFRONT THE PCF IS BASED ON SEVERAL INTERESTING ELECTORAL TRENDS, MOST NOTABLY THE SECOND-ROUND DEFECTION OF NUMEROUS COMMUNIST VOTERS, MANY OF WHOM HAVE BEEN RAISED ON THE CONCEPTS OF THE UNION OF THE LEFT AND REPUBLICAN DISCIPLINE. ACCORDING TO JEAN-MARC LECH, THE HEAD OF IFOP, HIS MOST RECENT UNPUBLISHED POLLS SHOW THAT ABOUT 30 PERCENT OF PCF SUPPORTERS WILL VOTE FOR A BETTER-PLACED SOCIALIST ON THE SECOND ROUND, EVEN IF THE PCF CANDIDATE STAYS IN THE RACE. FAJARDIE TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE ESTIMATES ABOUT 25-33 PERCENT COMMUNIST SUPPORT UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, WITH A LOW OF 15 PERCENT IN GASTON DEFFERRE'S MARSEILLE CIRCUMSCRIPTION (WHICH EVEN SO DEFFERRE WINS EASILY). IFOP RESULTS ALSO SHOW THAT ABOUT 8-9 PERCENT OF THE GAULLISTS WILL VOTE PS RATHER THAN PR OR CDS ON THE SECOND ROUND, AND AN ESTIMATED 15-17 PERCENT OF PR AND CDS VOTERS WILL SUPPORT THE PS RATHER THAN THE RPR.

5. THE SOCIALISTS WILL ALSO BENEFIT IN ABOUT 160 CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS (FAJARDIE'S ESTIMATE) FROM PCF INABILITY TO BREAK THAT FIRST ROUND BARRIER OF 12.5 PERCENT OF THE REGISTERED VOTERS (15.6 OF THOSE VOTES ACTUALLY CAST, GIVEN AN 80 PERCENT TURNOUT). IN THOSE DISTRICTS, THERE CAN BE NO PCF CANDIDATE ON THE SECOND ROUND AND PS SUPPORT AMONG COMMUNIST VOTERS WOULD CLIMB MUCH HIGHER.

6. THE SOCIALISTS AND THE FUTURE: BECAUSE OF THIS RELATIVE IMMUNITY, THE PS CONTINUES TO BE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC FOR THE FUTURE:

- BLAME FOR LEFT DISUNION IS GENERALLY BEING LAID ON THE COMMUNIST DOORSTEP;
- SOCIALISTS ARE GAINING ELECTORALLY FROM THEIR

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INCREASED SEPARATION FROM THE PCF;

- PS HANDS ARE FREER THAN EVER FOR THE PROGRAMMATIC NEGOTIATIONS WHICH WOULD FOLLOW A LEFT VICTORY.

SHOULD THE PCF DECIDE TO GO TO THE WALL IN THE NAME OF WORKING CLASS FIDELITY OR WHATEVER, THE PS FEELS IT COULD ONLY PROFIT FROM WHAT WOULD BE ESSENTIALLY AN ACT OF DESPERATION AND SELF-DESTRUCTION:

- THE PCF WOULD TAKE THE WHOLE RAP FOR LEFT FAILURE IN 1978, THUS DISCREDITING ITSELF AND CAUSING ITS ELECTORAL INFLUENCE TO FALL (TO ABOUT 15 PERCENT, SAYS FAJARDIE);

"9-- THE SOCIALISTS WOULD NOT ONLY PICK UP THE COMMUNIST PIECES BUT ALSO SEE THEMSELVES REINFOR-

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CED TOWARD THE CENTER, ALL WITHOUT COMPROMISING THEIR CURRENT POLITICAL STANCE.

THE SOCIALISTS THUS SEE THEMSELVES FACED WITH O POSSIBLE SCENARIOS, NEITHER OF WHICH IS DISCOURAGING:

- AS POSSIBLY THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE ASSEMBLY, READY TO GOVERN EITHER WITH THE PCF OR ALONE IF THE SITUATION SO DICTATES;

- BUT LIKEWISE PERFECTLY WILLING TO WAIT (PARIS 2609) FOR THE NEXT ELECTORAL TEST WHICH THEY (AND MANY OTHERS) BELIEVE WILL NOT BE MORE THAN NINE MONTHS TO A YEAR AWAY AND FOR WHICH THEIR EXPANDED ELECTORAL BASE AND PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTH PROMISE CONTINUED GROWTH.

7. PCF IN SEARCH OF A STRATEGY: FOR THE COMMUNISTS, HOWEVER, THE FUTURE MUST APPEAR MORE UNCERTAIN. THERE IS PRESENTLY NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE PCF CAN HOPE FOR MUCH MORE THAN BARELY CRACKING THE 21 PERCENT BARRIER (LATEST IFOP POLL SHOWS 20 PERCENT). THERE IS LIKEWISE LITTLE QUESTION THAT THE FIRST-ROUND VOTE IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL AS JUSTIFICATION OF COMMUNIST STRATEGY SINCE 1972 -- A PARIS PCF SECTION HEAD TOLD EMBOFF THAT FAILURE TO DO BETTER THAN 21 PERCENT WOULD INDICATE THAT "FRANCE IS MORE REFORMIST AND LESS REVOLUTIONARY THAN HAD BEEN THOUGHT" AND THAT PCF STRATEGY WOULD HAVE TO BE ADJUSTED ACCORDINGLY. PARTY LEADERSHIP HAS TACKLED FIRST ONE WAY AND THEN ANOTHER SINCE AT LEAST MID-1974 IN TRYING TO COUNTER THE INEXORABLE GROWTH OF THE PS, BUT TO DATE NOTHING HAS WORKED. THERE IS A GENERAL SENSE THAT MARCH 12 IS THE FINAL RECKONING FOR THE STRATEGY OF LEFT UNITY AND THAT THE RESULTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE POSITIVE FOR THE PCF.

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8. THE CURRENT LINE: SPEAKING BEFORE SOME 70,000 SUPPORTERS FEBRUARY 16, COMMUNIST (PCF) LEADER GEORGES MARCHAIS DESCRIBED PARTY STRATEGY IN THREE SIMPLE PHRASES: MAXIMIZE THE COMMUNIST VOTE ON MARCH 12, REACH PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT WITH THE PS ON MARCH 13 (WHICH WOULD CONSEQUENTLY REVIVE THE DYNAMIC OF LEFT UNION), WIN THE ELECTIONS ON MARCH 19 AND PARTICIPATE IN A LEFT GOVERNMENT. A NEAT PACKAGE, BUT WITH TWO BIG QUESTION MARKS:

- WILL THE PCF FIRST-ROUND VOTE IN FACT BE MASSIVE ENOUGH TO SATISFY THE PARTY LEADERSHIP AND TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT NEGOTIATING MUSCLE FOR FORCING SOCIALIST CONCESSIONS ON BOTH PROGRAM GOALS AND MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS?

-- REGARDLESS OF COMMUNIST STRENGTH, IS THE PS
EVEN WILLING TO TALK BETWEEN THE TWO ROUNDS?
THE ANSWER TO BOTH QUESTIONS IS PROBABLY NO, WHICH DOES
NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THE PCF HIGH COMMAND, BUT SOME DOUBT
STILL REMAINS ON THESE POINTS.

9. JEAN-MARC LECH (MR. IFOP) TOLD US FEBRUARY 16 THAT
THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP IS "COMPLETELY DISORIENTED",
HAVING TRIED EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO REBALANCE THE ELEC-
ORAL EQUATION AND NOW APPARENTLY HELPLESS TO STOP THE PS
ADVANCE IN MARCH. IN A PRIVATE DISCUSSION WITH EMBOFF,
A PCF SECTION HEAD SAID PESSIMISTICALLY THAT THE COMMU-
NISTS WERE "TRAPPED" FOR THE COMING ELECTIONS AND THAT
HE EXPECTS AN EMERGENCY NATIONAL CONVENTION TO BE CALLED
ON MARCH 13-14 TO PUT A PUBLIC STAMP OF APPROVAL ON A
PARTY STRATEGY, WHICH CAN ONLY BE DEFENSIVE IN NATURE.
HE FURTHER SPECULATED THAT THE MOST LIKELY POLICY WOULD
BE TO TAKE NO NATIONAL STAND, BUT TO CHARGE
EACH FEDERATION WITH MAKING A DECISION BASED ON LOCAL
CONDITIONS, THUS ALLOWING SOME PS-PCF HORSE-TRADING ON
A CIRCUMSCRIPTION BY CIRCUMSCRIPTION BASIS (AN IDEA NOT
MUCH IN KEEPING WITH THE PCF'S PRACTICE OF A CENTRALLY-
DIRECTED ORGANIZATION). IMPLICIT IN SUCH A POSITION
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WOULD BE A TACIT RECOGNITION THAT THE COMMUNISTS HAD
LOST THE BATTLE OF THE UNION OF THE LEFT; WHERE THE
PARTY TURNS NEXT WOULD BE A VERY BIG QUESTION INDEED AND
ONE CERTAIN TO BE POSED AT A NATIONAL CONGRESS IN THE
NEAR TERM.

10. WHAT'S LEFT FOR MARCH 1978?: BUT FOR THE ELECTIONS
OF THIS MARCH, PCF OPTIONS NOW SEEM LIMITED. IMPORTANT
PRESSURES COMBINE TO FORCE THE COMMUNISTS TOWARD FORMAL
ELECTORAL COOPERATION, EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF PROGRAMMA-
TIC AGREEMENT:

- THE PS IS RELATIVELY IMMUNE FROM COMMUNIST
SABOTAGE, SO THAT NON-COOPERATION BECOMES
ESSENTIALLY SELF-DESTRUCTION FOR THE PCF;
- LACKING SECOND-ROUND CANDIDATES IN NEARLY ONE-

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-THIRD OF THE DISTRICTS AND SUFFERING DEFEC-
TIONS ELSEWHERE IN FAVOR OF REPUBLICAN DIS-
CIPLINE, THE PCF SCORE ON MARCH 19 WOULD BE A
CERTAIN EMBARRASSMENT IN COMPARISON WITH
MARCH 12;
-- THE COMMUNISTS WOULD TAKE THE BLAME FOR LEFT
FAILURE, CONSEQUENTLY CRIPPLING THEMSELVES

ELECTORALLY AND BOOSTING PS STOCK (WHOSE CANDIDATES WILL STEP DOWN REGARDLESS OF PCF LACK OF RECIPROCITY).

11. UNCERTAINTY PREVAILS: EVEN THOUGH PRESSURED TO APPLY REPUBLICAN DISCIPLINE, THE COMMUNISTS WOULD RETAIN A CAPABILITY TO NONETHELESS QUIETLY SABOTAGE JUST THAT HANDFUL OF SEATS NECESSARY TO DENY A LEFT VICTORY. IFOP'S ESTIMATION OF FEBRUARY 13, FOR EXAMPLE, GIVES THE LEFT JUST 253 DEPUTIES (246 NEEDED FOR MAJORITY). A PCF "SELECTIVE SABOTAGE" TACTIC WOULD AVOID THE PITFALL OF SECOND-ROUND EMBARRASSMENT AND BECOMING THE OBVIOUS SCAPEGOAT FOR LEFT FAILURE WHILE LIKEWISE ELIMINATING THE NECESSITY TO MAKE A DECISION ON GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION OR ON SUPPORT OF A PS GOVERNMENT. IF THE PCF DOES NOT WANT TO GOVERN, THEN THE ROUTE JUST DESCRIBED OFFERS DEFINITE ADVANTAGES, ALTHOUGH IT CALLS FOR SOME CHANCY ELECTORAL CALCULATIONS. IF, HOWEVER, THE COMMUNISTS DO WANT TO PARTICIPATE, THE POWER IS PROBABLY IN THEIR HANDS TO RETURN A LEFT MAJORITY, ALBEIT ONE IN WHICH THE SOCIALISTS WOULD OPERATE FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH. TO PUBLICLY JUSTIFY SUCH COOPERATION WITH THE PS, THE PCF WOULD HAVE TO FIND SOME FACE-SAVING MECHANISM, BUT THAT COULD CONCEIVABLY BE DONE THROUGH AN AGREEMENT ON GENERAL PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AS ALREADY OFFERED BY THE SOCIALISTS. A FINAL ALTERNATIVE SEEMS POSSIBLE FOR THE PCF: TO COOPERATE ELECTORALLY AND POSSIBLY THUS WINNING A LEFT MAJORITY, BUT THEN TO REFUSE TO ENTER A LEFT GOVERNMENT, CLAIMING PERHAPS INSUFFICIENT PROGRAMMATIC GUARANTEES ON THE PART OF THE PS. THE ODDS ARE THAT THE PCF HAS NOT YET MADE A FINAL DECISION -- IN THAT SENSE, THE PROSPECTS FOR MARCH REMAIN AS UNCERTAIN AS EVER.

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